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FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8561  
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 6021  
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0186  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4675  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1253  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1430  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1042  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS  
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS  
USAID/DCHA FOR WGARVELINK, LROGERS  
DCHA/OFDA FOR GGOTTLIEB, MMARX, IMACNAIRN, KCHANNEL  
DCHA/FFP FOR JDWORKEN, TANDERSON, PMOHAN, PBERTOLIN, JMAJERNIK  
USAID/AFR/AA AND AFR/EA FOR JBORNS, SMCLURE  
NAIROBI FOR OFDA JMYER, GPLATT; REDSO/FFP NESTES  
KAMPALA FOR USAID DSUTHER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [ER](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: ERITREA EXPELS TWO MORE NGOS

¶1. Summary: The Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) ordered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Samaritan's Purse(SP) and the International Rescue Committee(IRC) to terminate operations in Eritrea by November 15, 2006. In a letter dated October 31 and signed by the Minister of Labor and Human Welfare Askulu Menkerios, the GSE notified both NGOs that due to the signing of the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement(ESPA) they must discontinue operating their Eastern Sudan programs from their base in Asmara, including halting Samaritan's Purse's cross-border humanitarian food distributions in Sudan via Eritrea. IRC, which has programs in Eritrea as well as cross-border programs for Eastern Sudan through Eritrea, was told to stop all development operations including those in Eritrea. Both NGOs plan to transfer their assets for Eastern Sudanese programs to the Beja Relief Organization(BRO) in Eastern Sudan. Their ability to deliver humanitarian aid to Eastern Sudan, however, will rely on gaining GOS permission to work in Eastern Sudan from within Sudan. End Summary.

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CLOSING UP SHOP  
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¶2. Both IRC and SP received identical letters in early November informing them they would need to close down operations in Eritrea. Each protested the closure to no avail. In a November 15 meeting with Poloff and the Humanitarian Program Assistant, the acting local director of Samaritan's Purse, said the termination was "not a surprise but a disappointment because of the arbitrary date chosen to close our operation." The letter explained that due to the signing of the ESPA, the "cross-border operations were no longer required." The same day, the IRC country director confirmed that IRC had received an identical letter. IRC's requests for permission to finish several small, on-going projects went unanswered and eventually IRC decided to move ahead with the close-out. The GSE regional governors for Anseba and Debub told the IRC director that they had been informed of the decision nearly two months ago and had

unsuccessfully lobbied the Ministry on IRC's behalf.

¶3. The GSE verbally agreed that both NGOs would be permitted to transfer all of their in-country assets to the Beja Relief Organization for continuation of their Eastern Sudan programs. Both IRC and SP representatives report, however, that their programs in Eastern Sudan will remain suspended until they obtain agreement from the Government of Sudan to provide support in Eastern Sudan from within Sudan. (Note: Historically, the GOS has strictly controlled NGO operations in Eastern Sudan and restricted service delivery by NGOs based within Sudan. End note.) SP distributed the last of their Eritrean-based private food stock of lentils, CSB and oil last week, providing Sudanese recipients both in Eritrea and in Sudan with approximately 45 days of food. (Note: SP provided humanitarian aid to an estimated 32,000 Sudanese Beja who have historically moved back and forth across the border. These individuals are not clearly either refugees or IDPs and it is not known if the GSE will allow these Sudanese Beja to remain in Eritrea. SP has requested permission from the GSE to continue to provide assistance to these individuals. End Note.) The remaining SP assets to be transferred consist mainly of furniture, office equipment and supplies, a few vehicles and medical supplies. IRC's situation and asset list look nearly the same. IRC anticipates, though, that the GOS may permit some of their programs previously operated cross-border to continue with a base in Sudan as IRC has staff detailed to the BRO and has had limited access to Eastern Sudan from within Sudan already.

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CONTINUING OPERATIONS IN SUDAN, WILL IT HAPPEN?  
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¶4. Both IRC and SP profess to have strong support from Eastern Sudanese leaders for their work there. According to SP, the head of the Beja Congress, Mussa Mohammed, wants SP to continue their operations, in particular the food distribution. Other local leaders, including the Wali in Kessala, have also expressed their desire for the programs to continue. Until the GOS decides if it will allow for SP to operate programs in Eastern Sudan from their headquarters in Khartoum the hospital, medical program and food distribution will be halted. With no history of providing services from within Sudan to the East and with SP's programs in Darfur already strictly limited by the GOS, SP's acting local director expressed uncertainty regarding SP's future in Eastern Sudan. For IRC, the situation is slightly different as they had GOS support already for some of their operations in Eastern Sudan and have infrastructure that is in place already. Yet, IRC is aware they will need the GOS to consent to operate their programs and to allow IRC staff to travel to Eastern Sudan and provide supplies and equipment for the programs.

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IRC OPERATIONS IN ERITREA SHUT DOWN TOO  
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¶5. Whereas SP was only using Eritrea as transit for its programs in Sudan, IRC had been managing both cross-border and Eritrean programs from Asmara. IRC has operated in Eritrea in the Debub and Anseba regions since 2001, and had USD 4.4 million committed for water and sanitation projects. In terminating IRC's NGO registration in Eritrea, the GSE decision also shuts-down IRC's operations within Eritrea. The IRC director told Poloff that when he discussed the closure with Minister Askulu, she expressed total surprise that IRC had projects within Eritrea. After IRC's closure, that is anticipated by November 29, unused funds for these Eritrean programs will be returned to the donors.

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SAMARITAN'S PURSE WILL TRY TO RE-REGISTER  
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¶6. Despite being asked to close down, SP acting local director said SP wants to remain in Eritrea. SP's director indicated to Poloff that they plan to explore re-registering the NGO with the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare with the intent of providing programs within Eritrea. SP is considering a proposal to the GSE on wheelchair distribution or other development programs.

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COMMENT

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¶7. Following on the heels of the signing of the ESPA, the closing by the GSE of IRC and SP came as no surprise. With peace in Eastern Sudan and normalizing relations between Sudan and Eritrea, from the GSE's perspective there is no need for SP and IRC to continue operating programs in Sudan via Eritrea. The signing of the agreement also offered a convenient excuse in what appears to be a continuing GSE trend of removing NGOs from Eritrea. The need for foreign assistance services in Eastern Sudan, however, remains. Whether SP and IRC will be able to continue their programs in Sudan will likely depend on the level of pressure exerted from the people of Eastern Sudan and upon the GOS willingness to loosen the restrictions on NGOs within Sudan. End Comment.

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